Gardening Question and Answer

Distribute 05-26-2016

Q. My squash plants seem so healthy. Lots of foliage and blooms but now they are cut off at the base. I applied Sevin dust to the plant but it didn’t help. Any ideas?

A. The usual problem is squash vine borers. Check at the base of the plant and I suspect that you will find that the stem is collapsed. There is probably some excrement and holes in the stem from the borers. The trick with the Sevin dust is that it must be applied every week at the growing point to intercept the moths and their egg-laying. The borers hatch from the eggs and penetrate the stem. Another alternative is to grow tatuma or one of the other square stemmed squashes. They taste the same as crookneck and are resistant to the borers.

Q. Our St Augustine lawn is chlorotic (yellow) and we applied the product, Ironite, thinking the yellowing is from an iron shortage. Nothing is happening. Could it be something other than an iron shortage? Is there a better treatment.

A. Ironite is a very slow treatment. In tests I conducted several years ago, the fastest response came from applying a chelated iron product (such as Sequestrene) through your hose end sprayer to the grass foliage. . The fertilizer Iron Plus is also relatively fast to address the symptoms. The chlorosis is due to a fast acid -loving plant growing plant trying to uptake iron from a cool alkaline soil before the root system is at full capacity. There is probably also a nitrogen component.

Q. I thought that the groundcover Asiatic jasmine is deer-proof? We planted it and fought the weeds only to lose the battle against the deer. What groundcovers are deer-proof?

A. In some neighborhoods Asiatic jasmine may be deer proof. In full sun lantana, especially the spreading lavender, is a good groundcover. Most years it is evergreen and may even bloom in the winter. Another good choice is prostate rosemary. For something different consider iris as a groundcover. The cemetery iris are relatively short and are very drought tolerant. In my neighborhood dwarf Chinese holly makes a good groundcover that deer do not eat.

Society garlic makes a fair groundcover in sun or shade. Dwarf ruellia makes a good groundcover in sun or shade. Deer may eat it in droughts. Same goes for shrimp plant. It is good idea to spray even a deer-proof new planting with Liquid Fence to discourage deer from pulling new transplants out of the ground because of curiosity.

Q We planted 3 Mexican white oaks last fall. Two are doing well but one has yellowish leaves. I notice it is in a low spot in the lawn and the water sits there sometimes. Could that be an issue?

A. Yes, a newly planted tree is especially susceptible to poor drainage. Problems that you are seeing did not show up during the 7 or 8 years when we had dry weather but it is an issue now. You can move the tree to a site where the soil drains better. Depending on the extent of the problem, the tree may be able to send out some roots during the dry summer and become less affected by the soggy soil. A compromise may be to raise the soil in the area and replant the tree in the raised area.